

localnews

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LIVING

Readers share wildlife observations

We are all close to nature, even right in the heart of Peterborough

I would like to take time this week and next to thank the many readers who have contacted me over the past year to share their sightings. These communications are a constant source of interest and inspiration for me. This week I'd like to present a small sample of the many anecdotes and observations I've received over the past 12 months. These encounters with wildlife show just how close we all are to nature, even right in the heart of Peterborough. I'm always delighted, too, by the many digital photographs readers send, a few of which you'll find on this page.

JANUARY

• Valerie Wyatt, and her husband Paul Grant, found a white-winged scoter with a group of 12 Common Goldeneyes near the east side of the bridge at Gannon's Narrows. A common loon was also present in the same area.

• Nan Campbell reported a pair of bald eagles that appeared to be building a nest on an island in Hamilton Bay on Stony Lake. As it turned out, they abandoned their nest-building soon after but now appear to be back at it. On February 26, Rob Tonus had the privilege of seeing an adult eagle fly right over downtown Peterborough. About a month later, Rose Rogers saw a pair of these magnificent birds soar over Gannon's Narrows.

• Even though red-bellied woodpeckers are becoming increasingly common in the Kawarthas, it's still a real treat to see one. Brendan Boyd had a male coming to his feeder on River Road along the Indian River. Michael Gillespie reported a pair of red-bellies on David Fife Line near Keene.

• Bruce Flemons saw what he believed to be a fisher crossing a farmer's field east of Omemee. On January 14, he confirmed the identification as he saw the animal's distinctive prints in the fresh snow.

• Gavin Hunter, who also lives near Omemee, saw an all-white ermine (long-tailed weasel) in his shed. It appeared to be pregnant and had a dead red squirrel in its mouth.

FEBRUARY

• Luke Berg and his mom see a host of interesting birds and other animals when walking their dogs in the Trent University Nature Area. On February 2, they came across about 20 bohemian waxwings as well as a very uncommon winter wren.

• On February 4, Sharon Simpkins saw two trumpeter swans fly north up the Otonabee River. These same two birds had summered in Kent's Bay near Hiawatha. Sharon also reported



DREW MONKMAN

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

that Wild Turkeys are seemingly everywhere in this area.

• The mild February weather proved to be confusing to some birds. Janet Johnstone and Doug Latham were dumbfounded to see a pair of eastern bluebirds at their bird boxes. The birds were going from box to box, almost as if they were ready to get a very early start at nesting. In the past, the earliest Janet and Doug had seen bluebirds was March 25th. They also enjoyed watching a young river otter in a near-by stream. "So many joys, living in the country!" they wrote.

• The following day, Scott Sargent, who lives in the Omemee area, was also paid a visit by bluebirds who were busy inspecting boxes. "It was very nice to see them again - it made my day - but I hope they don't think it's April!" Scott commented.

• On February 6, Mike Burrell used his lunch hour to check out the gulls roosting on the ice on Little Lake. "There were the most gulls I have seen this winter. I viewed them from the south side of the lake and counted 600 mostly adult herring gulls, 20 adult ring-billed gulls, two adult and two first winter Iceland gulls, one first winter glaucous gull, and two first winter great black-backed gulls." Many of these birds hung around for several weeks.

• Two days later, Abby MacNaughton and Brendan Boyd saw an adult northern goshawk on River Road between Hope Mill Road and David Fife Line. This is our most powerful and spectacular hawk.

• Sue Paradis has a very busy feeder on Tudor Crescent in Peterborough. On February 9, she wrote: "Today, I was watching a robin feeding in my crabapple tree when a northern flicker flew in and starting eating the fruit, as well. This robin has been around all winter but in the last couple of weeks has been very territorial and has been chasing other birds away if they landed in 'his' tree. The flicker was a bit big for the robin so he just kept an eye on him." About a week later, Sue had a flock of two dozen robins and three dozen starlings show up in her backyard. "My territorial robin was kept busy chasing all and any bird that tried to land in his tree. He was successful, but he'll be tired tonight! Today I also had an American Robin on the street who was singing his head off like it was a morning in April - instead of mid-February!"



STEPHENIE ARMSTRONG Special to The Examiner

Wild turkeys near Warsaw.

MARCH

• You don't need to live in the country to see interesting species. On March 2, Don Finigan, who lives near Highland Heights School, emailed me to say that his wife observed a flock of several hundred bohemian waxwings sitting in a tree along the Parkway Trail behind Wal-Mart. On March 19, the Finigans also saw a mourning cloak butterfly in their backyard.

• Trumpeter swan sightings came fast and furious this month. "At first I thought I was seeing things, but I'm sure a pair of trumpeter swans flew by Gannon's Narrows yesterday," wrote Rose Rogers. At the end of the month, Ivan Bateman emailed to say that "For the last three days a young trumpeter swan has resided in the creek between the Tollington Bridge at Beavermead Park and Armour Road. It is tagged with bright yellow wing tags, number J82. It seems calm and not frightened by quiet approach. Many passers by on the Trans-Canada Trail have noticed it." At the same time, Elizabeth Bingham saw three tagged trumpeters on Rice Lake near Keene. Their tags were J81, J84 and J88.

• With the record-mild temperatures, bird song returned early in the month. On March 6, Joanne O'Heron heard and saw her first red-winged blackbirds of the year.

• Little Lake offered up some great waterfowl viewing. On March 8, Scott Gibson had lunch at the lake and wrote: "In addition to the numerous mallards, common mergansers, hooded mergansers, and goldeneyes, there were also at least 60 ring-necked ducks, four black ducks, nine American wigeon, eight scaup, one redhead and one pied-billed grebe.

• Stephenie Armstrong, who lives on Sawmill Road on the

Indian River near Warsaw, always has interesting sightings to report. "On March 8, a pair of hooded mergansers arrived. They were diving for food in our little shallow bay. A day later, there were two male hoodies and one female. The female presumably chose one male who proceeded to chase away the other. Last year, we had two families of hoodies on the river. On March 10, a pair of Canada geese arrived. We usually have three pairs raising young on the river. The families come together when the young are still quite small, cruising the river and coming onto our back area to feed on the long grass in the summer." On March 15, Stephenie also saw "their" large, russet-brown male American mink.

• On March 11, Elizabeth Bingham observed a large flock of tundra swans on Rice Lake, just out from Serpent Mounds.



PAUL ANDERSON Special to The Examiner

Northern goshawk on a kill.

Two days later, Frank Millard saw a flock of 24 of this same species flying south near the Peterborough Airport.

• Sandhill cranes always make a noisy return each year in March. On March 11, Gavin Hunter of Omemee saw and heard his first crane of the year. A week later, Michael Gillespie saw a pair of sandhills near the mouth of the Indian River where it empties into Rice Lake. "They were calmly walking around, enjoying the great sunshine and probably establishing a nesting site."

• On March 12, Blair Hamilton, who lives on Pigeon Lake, found two Cecropia moth cocoons in the field by his house. Blair has planted a lot of native plants and shrubs on his property and is reaping the benefits in terms of the many butterflies that are drawn to the plantings.

• Kim Clark was also seeing

lots of waterfowl this spring. On March 16, she wrote: "Today at Little Lake I saw a male long-tailed duck and 19 redheads, in addition to the more common buffleheads, common mergansers, hooded mergansers, ring-necked ducks and lesser scaups. On County Road 21, I also saw a greater white-fronted goose."

• In mid-March, Murray Palmer of Wildlark Drive found an engorged wood tick in his heated birdbath. He was able to photograph the tick and believes it may have hitched a ride on a bird and then dropped off after becoming submerged in the water. Lyme disease is carried by the black-legged tick and as far as I know there has only been one sighting in Peterborough County. It was recorded at the Serpent Mounds several years ago.

• On March 19, Heathyr Francis reported that all of the ice was out on Big Bald Lake, north of Buckhorn. Five days later, Heathyr found a juvenile five-lined skink hiding under a rock near Mississauga Dam Road, east of County Road 507.

• Bryan Whitfield and Mary-Beth Aspinall live on Johnston Drive near the Peterborough Airport. Their property and surrounding area is a veritable wildlife sanctuary. On March 25, a pair of northern shovelers and eight green winged teal brightened a field across from their house.

To be continued next week

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